

NO GET HURT  
Hawaii



## SEPTEMBER IS SENIOR FALL PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

In observance of Senior Fall Prevention Awareness Month, this

issue of *Aloha Pumehana* features tips, stories and advice to help you lead a safe and healthy life.

One of the factors that can contribute to falls is medication. They may blur your vision, make you dizzy, or make you get up too often at night to use the bathroom and you could trip in the dark.

### DRUG REVIEW

Beginning September 10<sup>th</sup>, select Times, Safeway and Costco Pharmacies encourage seniors to make an appointment with their pharmacist for a comprehensive review of all drugs taken, including over-the-counter medicines and alcoholic beverages to see if they may make you sleepy or dizzy either alone or in combination. "Many patients forget that alcohol is actually a drug," says

Dr. Shari Kogan, Medical Director of Geriatric Services at the Queen's Medical Center. "If you drink any amount of alcohol, include it in your list. Doing so will help your doctor or pharmacist better evaluate which medications are safe for you to take," she said.

These pharmacies will also be distributing "*Preventing Falls - Tips for Seniors to Stay Safe at Home*," a handy flyer to stick on your refrigerator to remind you of how you can prevent a serious injury. Watch for notices in the stores nearest you.

### FREE SCREENING

A Physical Therapist will be available at the Hawaii Seniors' Fair and Good Life Expo on September 19-21, 2008 at the Blaisdell Exhibition Hall to conduct a balance screening for any senior that asks. Visit the Department of Health's Fall Prevention booth and get your FREE screening! 

## SURPRISE...I CAN'T DO THE THINGS I USED TO...!

### A Grandpa's True Story

Although most of us senior folks won't mention it, we know even before our doctor that we are getting older. We

feel it, but don't want to talk about it, or even ask questions about it. It is just too scary. It starts simple enough...you can't

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figure out why you got so winded chasing after your grandkids. Then there was the big garage spring cleaning, something you had done many times before, but this time your arms and back hurt for three days.

It's the subtle changes that are the most telling, like why can't you stay up and play cards all night like you

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used to, or why is it so much harder to read the newspaper now...have they made the print smaller?

So, considering myself in OK health and condition, imagine my surprise when I just fell down. I was walking through my living room and didn't notice the loose newspapers or was it the throw rug edge...but bang...I was on the floor. I was fortunate to hit the couch edge rather than the coffee table. I got one ugly bruise and twisted my back but I didn't break anything. At first I thought I was very lucky. I soon discovered that the twisted back was much worse than originally thought.

So I fell. Will I fall again?

Was it a single incident or has something changed inside me that makes me fall prone? The answers are not easy or simple and range from "yes" to "no" to "maybe." I do know this:

- I take three medications: one for cholesterol, no problem...one for day time back pain, probably a problem...and one for night time to help me relax and sleep because of the back injury...a real problem in the dark.
- I am not as steady on my feet. I still have good balance, but my muscles and nerves just don't react as fast as when I was younger. So if I stumble, it is really hard to catch myself and the result is usually a collision with a wall or fence. I don't fall down ...but I do stumble.
- And probably the worst symptom that I may fall again is that my brain still feels young and has not learned its lesson yet that I am not. In other words, on occasions, I still take chances that a senior (55 or older) should not.

In brief, I am a darn poster child for falls. The other day I tried to beat a blinking walk sign and sure enough, as I hurried and tried to jump up on the curb, I stumbled. Dumb. As I write this, I am nursing a very sore shoulder and neck because I jumped up out of my recliner to help my wife carrying groceries through the door, and promptly tumbled over the newspapers I had stacked to take out for recycling. Then I had a horrible thought...what if I fell holding my new 3-month old grandson?

All of these falls and stumbles were preventable...not accidents. So here is my promise:

- I will face my age.
- I will take deep breaths and savor doing things a little slower.
- I will anticipate that stuff can and will jump out of nowhere and make me stumble...so I will walk with care and balance.
- I will ask my pharmacist if any or all of my medications could make me dizzy, especially if I get up suddenly or at night.
- I will install that nightlight.
- I will go to the eye doctor like I promised my wife.
- And I will get help, even when I think I don't need it, for picking mangos, painting the garage and replacing the batteries in the smoke alarm.

Why the promises? Because my loved ones don't need to care for a broken old man that carelessly fell and hurt himself. I've worked too hard raising my family to not enjoy them because I was too dumb to be careful.

Walk careful...live safe...enjoy your family. — *Anonymous grandpa* 🧓

## "I'VE FALLEN AND I CAN'T GET UP" ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE!

### *Falls -The Hard Facts*

By *Daniel Galanis, PhD and EricTash, MPH*



Falls don't always happen to the other guy. In fact, 1 out of 3 Americans over the age of 65 fall, and some fall multiple times.

On the average, every 5 hours in Hawaii, a senior suffers a fall injury so serious they must be hospitalized. Only 40% of patients are able to go back home after discharge from the hospital.

Most people think older adults may only break their hip when they fall, but research shows that traumatic brain injuries can be a serious consequence. Traumatic brain injuries are caused by a blow or bump to the head.

**Just how serious is it?** Falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries among seniors in Hawaii. And fatal falls increase steadily as seniors get older.

From 2001 through 2007, falls were the leading cause of senior:

- **Fatal injuries (70 per year),**
- **Injury related hospitalizations (1,615 per year)**
- **Emergency department visits (4,300 per year)**

Although accurate data on all the causes of fatal falls among seniors is sketchy, it is known that over one-third of the deaths were due to falls "on the same level," meaning that your

bedroom may be just as dangerous as your stairs if you are not careful.

**Did you know that as a Hawaii senior, you are 10 times more likely to be hospitalized from a fall than from a vehicle crash, an assault, or being struck while a pedestrian?**

For every senior who died from a fall, it is estimated that there were 24 who required hospitalization, and another 63 who were treated in an emergency room. Although men led in fatal falls, two-thirds with non-fatal fall injuries are women. Forty one percent suffered a fracture, most commonly fractures of the thigh bone (14%).

One third of these non-fatal falls were again *“on the same level - slipping, tripping or stumbling.”* Sixteen percent were *from “one level to another,”* most commonly from beds, stairs or steps, and chairs.

#### What are the main causes for falls?

Emergency Medical Services records on Oahu show that an estimated 64% of falls involved personal factors such as loss of balance, getting up from chairs, getting out of bed, etc. Environmental factors such as clutter, loose rugs, tripping on a phone cord, slippery bathtub, etc. were noted in 26% of reports. Three fourths of all falls occurred in the home environment.

**Falling is not inevitable.** According to the Centers for Disease Control, falls are not an inevitable consequence of aging, but they do occur more often in older adults because risk factors for falls are usually associated with health and aging conditions. Some of these include mobility problems due to muscle weakness or poor balance, loss of sensation in the feet, chronic health

conditions, vision changes or loss, medication side effects or drug interactions and home and environmental hazards such as clutter or poor lighting.

There are many programs, agencies and individuals that can help prevent falls. For additional information, call the Hawaii Department of Health Injury Prevention Program at 733-9202. 📞

## Preventing Falls – Tips for Seniors to Stay Safe



- Exercise regularly. It increases strength, flexibility and balance.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines...both prescription and over-the-counter.
  - Many medicines can cause side effects such as weakness or dizziness.
  - Both can increase the risk of falls.
- Have your eyes checked regularly.
- Wear the right footwear. The safest shoes fit your feet, have low heels, non-slip soles, and lace up or are secured with fabric fasteners.
- Stay out of trees and off the roof.
- Make your home safer by removing fall hazards and improving lighting.
  - Remove clutter like loose papers, boxes, wires and phone cords from walk paths and stairways.
  - Add lighting or make lights brighter especially in stairways.
  - Consider a nightlight in the bathroom, bedroom and hallways. 📞

## EXERCISE HELPS MAINTAIN INDEPENDENCE and PREVENT FALLS

*By Valorie Taylor*

*Honolulu Gerontology Program*

The number one comment heard amongst seniors is their desire to remain independent. However, independence can be affected as people age and begin to “slow down.” They may have medical problems that cause tiredness or pain. They may begin to withdraw from their usual activities. The lack of activity causes muscle weakness and can increase their chances of falling.

There is one thing that we can do to help us remain independent as we age - EXERCISE. Having a simple exercise program followed regularly can help us remain independent in three ways:

1. Exercise improves balance, flexibility, endurance and strength thereby decreasing the fall risk.
  - A simple walking program is the easiest. By gradually increasing the distance that is walked over a period of time you can increase the strength in your legs.
  - Another option is to try and walk a little faster thereby increasing your heart rate.
  - If walking is difficult, stretching, Tai Chi or Yoga may be better for you. Many county

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agencies, churches and senior centers offer simple exercise programs.

2. Exercise can help to manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

- The benefits of regular exercise include looking and feeling better.
- Exercise increases oxygen in the body and also can increase the “feel good” chemicals in the brain.
- Those who exercise sleep better and may notice an increase in mental acuity.
- Exercise improves digestion and elimination.

3. Exercise increases the chance of recovering from a fall and may reduce the recovery time.

- The old adage “If you don’t use it, you lose it” is so true when it comes to exercise.
- Our muscles become weak even after a couple days in bed sick.
- A regular exercise program can help you recover faster if you do fall.

It is very important to check with your doctor when starting an exercise program. Start slowly and build up gradually. IF SOMETHING HURTS, STOP DOING IT. Drink more water (which keeps you hydrated) and keep breathing. Holding your breath during exercise can cause dizziness. Regular exercise can help us all to remain independent by improving our health and reducing our risks for falls. And once you start...stay at it so you continue to reap the benefits. As the Nike commercial says — “*Just Do IT!*”

## SENIORS & FALLING: IT COULD BE YOUR EYES

By Roger Christian Ede, O.D.

Can’t see good at night? Headlights blind your eyes? Spill your coffee? Have double vision? As we get older these are some things that may gradually, or suddenly, happen to us. Some are due to natural changes, but others are caused by serious eye or health conditions that may lead to blindness and even death if left untreated. Injuries caused by accidents such as tripping, falling or car crashes may be caused by these vision changes.

Because vision is vital to daily living, it is important to have regular eye exams. For most seniors, normal age-related vision loss can be corrected with glasses, medication or surgery. Even with more serious conditions, using vision aids and making changes in life-style can help seniors stay safe and independent.

### Some normal changes that occur in aging:

- Difficulty reading small print.
- Taking longer to adjust from light to dark.
- Increased sensitivity to sunlight or reduced vision in glare.
- Loss of depth perception making it difficult to judge distance.
- Difficulty in seeing contrasts and colors.
- Dry eyes or watery eyes.

### Some signs or symptoms of serious vision changes:

- Squinting and/or greater sensitivity to light and glare.
- Spilling food or drinks because you misjudge where items are.
- Making driving mistakes, such as missing street signs, misjudging turns; difficulty driving at night.
- Falling because of a missed step or unseen object on the floor.

- Seeing flashes of light or rapid movement from the corners of your eyes.
- Sudden onset of spots, floaters, shadows.
- Choosing bright over dull colored objects or clothing.
- Finding it hard to copy from written texts.
- Becoming clumsy, such as having difficulty in threading a needle or buttoning a shirt.

### When to call for Immediate Consultation/Examination:

- Partial or complete loss of vision in one or both eyes, even if temporary.
- Double vision, even if temporary.
- Sensation of a shade or curtain blocking your vision.
- Blind spots, halos around lights, areas of distorted vision.
- Sudden painful eye, especially if it is also red. A red, painful eye is a medical emergency.

### Prevention:

- Annual eye exam by an ophthalmologist or optometrist if you are 65 years or older.
- Wear sunglasses for protection.
- Annual eye exam by an ophthalmologist or optometrist if you are 65 years or older.
- Wear sunglasses for protection.
- Don’t smoke.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Control blood pressure and cholesterol level.
- Control blood sugar levels.
- Exercise and weight contro.
- Eat foods rich in antioxidants, like green leafy vegetables.

If any vision problems are causing you trouble with your daily activities, call your eye doctor for an appointment. Don’t let untreated vision problems contribute to a fall or accident. 🧠



## "ELDERPROOF YOUR HOME" (Get a Home Safety Assessment)

By Project DANA Staff



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that many of the devastating falls that impact our seniors occur in the home environment. It is easy to see why. As adults mature and live in the same home for years, they become extremely comfortable within its environment. However, with aging come reduced mobility, balance issues, vision loss, and chronic health problems that can influence stability. Therefore, small changes, adjustments and awareness in and around the home can make a big difference in reducing falls.

First you must be very truthful with yourself and ask these questions?

### Are you at risk?

1. Have you fallen in the last year?
2. Do you take multiple prescribed medications?
3. Do you have trouble seeing clearly?

4. Do you have difficulty walking normally without pain or stiffness?
5. Are there physical obstructions in your home that make it difficult to move around, like stairs, low furniture or clutter?

If you answered "yes" to any of the above, you are at risk.

The good news is that 30-40% of these falls are preventable.

An important step to fall prevention is a home safety assessment as it will help:

- To increase the awareness of home safety with educational information.
- To create a safe home environment by identifying potential risk factors in the home.
- To enable participants to continue living independently and maintain their quality of life, with recommendations of possible home modification.

Avoid becoming a fall victim! If you believe you are at risk, call Project DANA. Qualified staff will schedule an appointment and discuss how to

improve yourself and your home environment.

- An inspection and review of your home will be conducted for fall safety concerns, i.e. loose area rugs, low furniture or obstacles in your pathways.
- Can you see where you are going, especially in the middle of the night? Is the light bright enough? Lighting is always a concern, as you must be able to see properly to prevent a fall.
- Grab bars, shower seats, and toilet rails to make your bathroom safer may be recommended.
- What about special needs? Is there sufficient room for a wheelchair or walker? Do you have an electric scooter and not have any way for it to enter your home?

Every person and everyone's home is different and your special needs will be addressed. Call Project DANA at 945-3736 for a FREE Home Safety Assessment today! ☎

## FALLS: A MEDICATION-RELATED PROBLEM AMONG OLDER AMERICANS

By Joy Higa, Pharm.D., CGP, Board Certified Geriatric Pharmacist

More than 200,000 people die and another 2.2 million are injured each year because of medication-related problems.

The Journal of the American Medical Association recently stated that if adverse reactions to medications were classified as a distinct disease, it would rank as the 5th leading cause of death in the U.S.

People over age 65 are especially vulnerable to medication-related problems due to the number of medications they take and the biologic changes of aging and disease.

Too often, illness in older people is misdiagnosed or dismissed as the normal process of aging, simply because health professionals are not trained to recognize how diseases and drugs affect older people.

Medical experts believe that many medication-related problems are predictable and thus preventable. Most people don't realize that falls can be a medication-related problem.

These are examples of medication-related problems:

- Confusion
- Delirium/hallucinations

- Depression
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Falls
- Incontinence
- Insomnia
- Loss of coordination
- Malnutrition/dehydration
- Memory loss
- Other psychiatric problems

Drug classes that frequently cause problems from their side-effects:

- Antihistamines
- Pain medicines

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# BITS AND PIECES

By **Tony Baccay**



Exciting News! Molokai General Hospital, Queens Medical Center and Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services are starting Kukui Ahi: Patient Navigation Services on Oahu. The program helps Medicare Part A&B beneficiaries with cancer screening and treatment services and is looking for eligible participants of Native Hawaiian, Asian, and/or Pacific Islander ancestry. Kukui Ahi helps people manage cancer-screening tests, doctor's appointments and healthcare issues. Home visits are available. Contact (808) 537-7422 for more information and program details.

**Caregivers Conference:** Elderly Affairs Division and AARP Hawaii are sponsoring the *Caring for Family, Caring for Yourself: Caregivers Conference* on Saturday, November 1, 2008 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. Over 20 sessions on various topics related to eldercare, plus self-care activities for caregivers will be offered. A resource fair with 30 exhibitors will provide information about their services to help caregivers and their family members.

Keynote speaker Dr. Bill Thomas is a Harvard Medical School graduate and an international authority on geriatric medicine and eldercare. He is currently an AARP Visiting Scholar and is the founder of the Eden Alternative, a global non-profit organization that is committed to improving the care received by people living in institu-

tions. Dr. Thomas also hosts KGMB TV's *Genius of Aging* broadcasts.

AARP President Jennie Chin Hansen is the luncheon keynote speaker. She was the former Executive Director of On Lok, Inc., a non-profit organization providing integrated and primary long-term care community-based services in San Francisco. For more information about the conference call the Senior Helpline at 768-7700.

**KCC Caregiver Training:** Are you caring for an elderly family member? The Kupuna Education Center at Kapi'olani Community College is offering *Family Caregiver Skills: Personal Care and Transfer Techniques* and *The Basics of Family Caregiving*, both of which are designed to teach caregiving skills and how to prevent burnout. Pre-registration is required and class sizes are limited. For more information, call 734-9108 or visit the website at [www.kupunaeducation.com](http://www.kupunaeducation.com).

**Economic Stimulus Payment:** It is not too late to file for the Economic Stimulus Payment (ESP)! Individuals must file a tax return before **Oct. 15, 2008**. People who have no tax filing requirement may still be eligible to receive \$300 (\$600 for married couples) if they have at least \$3,000 in qualifying income and file a 2007 "Economic Stimulus Payment" Federal income tax return. Qualifying income includes any combination of earned income from wages, salaries, tips or net earnings; certain retirement, disability or survivor's benefits from Social Security; disability pension or survivors' benefits from Department of Veterans Affairs. Call Aloha United Way 211 for free tax preparation sites still open.

**Plan for the Worst and Expect the Best:** The University of Hawaii Elder Law Project (UHELP) is offering free, non-credit classes designed for older persons, family members and caregivers. The curriculum covers basic legal information to include *Legal Planning for the Future: Incapacity, Protective Services, Guardianship/Conservatorship and their Alternatives; Basic Estate Planning, Including Wills, Trusts, Probate, Gifts, and Taxes; and Caregiving Issues: Hiring a Caregiver, Coping with Death and Hiring a Lawyer*. The one-hour class starts at 1:00 p.m. and meets weekly for six weeks beginning September 17, 2008 and till October 22, 2008. Reservations are required. Seating is limited to 50 applicants. For more information regarding the course, parking, books, etc. contact UHELP at 956-6544. ☎

## DID YOU KNOW?

By **Kevin Lockette, Physical Therapist and Cora Speck, MS, Injury Prevention and Research Coordinator, Queens Medical Center**

Did you know?

- The #1 predictor of falling is a previous fall.
- Good posture is critical to good balance. With age, some people develop a kyphotic posture which is a hump in the upper back. This posture causes a forward head and a hyperextension of the neck to be able to scan the environment in front. This postural change moves the center of gravity, making one more susceptible for falling backwards, especially with walking uphill.



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## SEPTEMBER 2008

- It is common for individuals to be unbalanced and/or fall following prolonged bed-rest or hospitalization. Not only do the muscles become weak and possibly atrophy, but the vestibular system (balance system located in the inner ear) is inefficient when unchallenged or stressed due to inactivity.
- Improving balance is actually only one facet of fall prevention. It's also important to maintain or improve mobility, strength and flexibility.
- Studies show that older adults with greater quadriceps strength are less likely to fall than those with lesser muscle strength in the same muscle group.
- Physical therapists can assess fall risk and design an exercise program aimed at reducing falls and improving center-of-gravity control in seated, standing and moving task situations. They can assess a person's need for an assistive device or other adaptive equipment needed for improved function and safety.
- Men could get osteoporosis!
- Drinking water is one of the simplest fall preventive efforts you can take in the battle against gravity. Dehydration can lead to dizziness upon standing, which makes you more prone to falls. As we age, our bodies start losing the mechanism that tells us when we're thirsty. Plus, the older you get, the more fluids you lose, especially in our hot climate. So remember to drink more water. ☺

**1** **1<sup>st</sup> Hawaii Chigiri-e Exhibition, Aug 6– Nov 7, Laser Eye Center, Pan Am Building, 1600 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 105, Mon – Fri, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Admission is free. Chigiri-e uses washi paper torn and pasted to create pictures. Pictures from Habuki School of Chigiri-e in Tokyo will be displayed. For more information, call the Moiliili Senior Center at 955-1555.**

**10** **AARP Driver Safety Program is a course (two 4-hour sessions) designed for the older driver. It identifies physical changes in the mature driver and ways to compensate for safer driving. Cost is \$10. Registration is required.**

- LANAKILA MULTI-PURPOSE SENIOR CENTER, 847-1322 / Sep 10 & 12
- QUEEN'S MEDICAL CENTER, 537-7117 / Sep 14 & 21
- HONOLULU KAISER CLINIC, 432-2260 / Sep 18 & 25
- WAIPIO KAISER CLINIC, 432-2260 / Sep 26 & 27

**15** **Hawaii Pacific Gerontological Society 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference: "Leaving A Legacy: Recreating Our Work and Life," Sept 15-16, 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawaii. General Registration fees: \$200 for two days. Discount rates available for seniors, caregivers and students. Advanced registration required. For more information, call 948-5717 or visit [www.hpgs.org](http://www.hpgs.org).**

**19** **Hawaii Seniors' Fair, "The Good Life Expo," Blaisdell Exhibition Hall, Sep 19-21, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. The expo will feature exhibits, educational seminars, lectures, workshops and continuous entertainment. Admission is free.**

## OCTOBER 2008

**17** **Medicare Part D Information Fair, Friday, Oct 17, 10 a.m. – 12 noon, Lanakila Multipurpose Senior Center. Speakers from Social Security and Sage PLUS provide information on the prescription drug plan. No vendors allowed. For more information, call 847-1322.**

**20** **AARP Driver Safety Program:**

- WAIKIKI COMMUNITY CENTER, 923-1802 / Oct 20 & 22

## NOVEMBER 2008

**5** **AARP Driver Safety Program:**

- WAIPIO KAISER CLINIC, 432-2260 / Nov 5 & 7
- HONOLULU KAISER CLINIC, 432-2260 / Nov 13 & 20
- AARP INFORMATION OFFICE, 843-1906 / Nov 14 & 21
- QUEEN'S MEDICAL CENTER, 537-7117 / Nov 16 & 23
- KAISER HAWAII KAI, 432-2260 / Nov 22 & 29

**6** **Show & Sell Bazaar, Thursday, Nov 6, Lanakila Multipurpose Senior Center, 8 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Food, crafts, books and white elephant items at bargain prices. Call 847-1322 for more information.**

**22** **Mayor's Craft and Country Fair, sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation, Saturday, Nov 22, Blaisdell Exhibition Hall, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Admission is Free. The fair will feature plant sales, arts and crafts, food, and continuous entertainment. Call 973-7258 for more information.**

### FALLS continued from page 5

- Psychoactive medicines including those for sleep, anxiety, relaxation and psychiatric conditions
- Anti-diabetic medicines

- Anti-hypertensive medicines
- Anti-seizure medicines
- Diuretics
- Vasodilators – dilates blood vessels; Viagra is an example

"Any symptom in an elderly patient should be considered a drug side effect until proved otherwise." ☺

America's Senior Care Pharmacists® American Society of Consultant Pharmacists



# SAVE THE DATE!

## Hawaii Caregivers Conference: Caring for Family, Caring for Yourself (Oahu)

**Saturday, November 1, 2008**  
**Sheraton Waikiki**  
**8 a.m. to 3 p.m.**



### REGISTRATION OPENS IN JUNE:

**\$45 For family caregivers**

**\$60 For professionals**

**Lunch and all sessions included in registration fee**

### ELDERLY AFFAIRS DIVISION

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Elderly Affairs Division is the Area Agency on Aging for Oahu. Our mission is to develop and support opportunities that enable older adults to live their fullest capacity in their own homes and communities.

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ALOHA PUMEHANA is published four times a year to provide the public with information on aging issues and programs. To be placed on the mailing list, please call 768-7700. Written contributions are welcomed.



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Mayor of Honolulu

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